

European Journal of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery celebrates its 25th Anniversary: 1987–2012

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‘Most misinterpretations do not come from not-knowing something, most misinterpretations come from accepting something as true which is not’.

Mark Twain

After the founding of the European Association for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery (EACTS) in 1986 [1], there was a need for a scientific journal. Francis Fontan and the other 12 founding members of the EACTS invited Hans Borst to become the first Editor-in-Chief. After careful preparation, the first issue of the official organ of the EACTS, the European Journal of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery (EJCTS), was published in July 1987.

Twenty-five years on, the EJCTS has established itself as one of the leading scientific journals of cardio-thoracic surgery worldwide, and we are fortunate to be able to celebrate this momentous anniversary with all four editors (Fig. 1). In this special editorial, each editor has described the history, special features, challenges and personal impressions during their terms, all of which have undoubtedly contributed to the success of the EJCTS today.

THE EJCTS: HOW IT CAME TO BE

by Hans Borst, Hannover
Editor-in-Chief from 1987–1993

The story of our journal goes back to the early decades following World War II. At that time, the progress in the quality and quantity of European cardio-thoracic surgery was reflected by several journals of limited impact. One of these was ‘Thoraxchirurgie, Vaskuläre Chirurgie’, serving mainly the German-speaking regions of the continent. Founded in 1953, it had become the official publication of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Thorax-, Herz- und Gefäßchirurgie and was published by Georg Thieme Verlag (Stuttgart, Germany). As time went by, the editorial staff of the journal began to recognize that a change from German to the upcoming *lingua franca* of scientific publishing, i.e. English, would vastly improve its attractiveness.

It was in 1978 that the editor of the German journal, Karl Vosschulte of Giessen University, encouraged the undersigned to take over his task. For an upcoming academic surgeon, this meant quite an honour. One of the reasons for this may have been that I was one of the few who were then in full command of the English language on account of 6 years spent in US academia. Also, my service in Hannover was one of the first independent units covering the full spectrum of thoracic, cardiac and vascular surgery. In any case, I accepted the editorship [2]. The journal was named *The Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeon*, in the hope of establishing the first all-European platform for publication in our field. The publisher was kept and the journal was promptly listed in by the Current Contents and Science Citation Index.

Several factors were of great help in starting this enterprise, while others turned out to be serious impediments. On the positive side, I was able to recruit a dynamic staff of editorial assistants from my senior co-workers, headed by Roland Hetzer. Rose-Marei Bösch, the editorial secretary, was of invaluable help to us, if only for her fluent English and she stayed with us to the end of my editorial activities. Much help and encouragement came from the outside, i.e. the members of the Editorial and Advisory Boards, which were composed of internationally recognized personalities. Interestingly, the new journal was not really welcomed on the European and especially on the US-American market, supposedly for fear of competition.

Publishing the new journal in English turned out to be a serious obstacle in a continent where the command of this language was not as widespread as it is today. To bridge this gap, we initially allowed the submission of German and French manuscripts, leaving it to the authors to provide a proper English translation upon acceptance of their texts. Nonetheless, it turned out that many contributors of non-Anglo-Saxon origin were unable to spell and phrase their manuscripts properly. This sometimes led to a good deal of touchiness following our proposals for corrections. Endless language polishing and tedious correspondence by regular mail resulted, since facsimile



Figure 1: The four Editors: Hans Borst (upper left), Marko Turina (upper right), Ludwig von Segesser (lower left) and Friedhelm Beyersdorf (lower right).

facilities were only developing at that time. This meant that most of the copy editing had to be performed in our office. Finally, the relatively limited sale of the journal made Thieme Verlag reluctant to increase its volume according to the growth of submissions. Nevertheless after 9 years of its existence, *The Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeon* had become a widely read publication on the European continent.

Things were to change dramatically in 1986, the year when the EACTS was founded [1]. At that time, Francis Fontan, the prime motor of this endeavour, invited me to become the editor of the official organ of the Association. I happily agreed to take on this new challenge. The journal, first appearing in 1987, received its present name. *The Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeon* was continued, as recently outlined by F. Beyersdorf [3].

When starting the journal, we were able to acquire the support of the specialty societies for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery of Austria, Great Britain and Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Scandinavia, as well as the Society of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery of the French-speaking Countries. In contrast to our previous experience, the new journal gained considerable appreciation on the other side of the Atlantic, ultimately resulting in close and fruitful cooperation between the respective editors.

One unexpected impediment to the journal's international recognition seems worth mentioning, if only because of its peculiar nature. Initially, several attempts at having the journal listed in Current Contents were turned down because of the supposed abundance of similar publications in this field. However, until 1991, the London office of Current Contents asked me for the background material of an article I had published in *Circulation Research* in 1956. An abstract of this material was to appear in Citation Classics. I promptly declined, pointing out the company's stubbornness. The result: the abstract was eventually published [4] and our journal has been listed with Current Contents and Science Citation Index since 1992!

While the composition of the journal's editorial staff remained the same, most of the representatives of the Editorial and Advisory Boards were now outstanding members of the EACTS. Notably, Axel Haverich of recent Stanford vintage became the senior Editorial Assistant, an office he held until my departure from the journal. In the hope of additional printing space and energetic international marketing, Springer Verlag (Heidelberg, Germany) was selected as the journal's new publishing house.

Like the EACTS itself, the journal was restructured following the example of its American peers. As a novelty in our field in Europe, this included a word-for-word coverage of the proceedings of its annual congresses. The international prestige of the journal grew dramatically in the wake of the Association's. This was mirrored by both the quality and the quantity of manuscripts submitted from all parts of the world, including the USA. The authors' English had much improved, as had their discipline. Moreover, the processing of manuscripts by the publisher was much more efficient, all of this facilitating the task of the editors and staff. Although Springer Verlag effectively expanded the international sale of the journal, there remained a constant battle over each additional printed page. As a result, the Association selected a new publishing house when Marko Turina became the new Editor of our journal.

In summary, I am both grateful and proud of the fact that I had been given the chance to create an all-European journal of high international ranking. The success of this endeavour is owed to the devotion to our common task shown by all the ladies and gentlemen within and outside the Hannover editorial office.

EJCTS IN A TRANSITION PERIOD

by Marko Turina, Zurich

Editor-in-Chief from 1993–2000

I was elected as Editor-in-Chief of the EJCTS in September 1993, at the annual meeting of the EACTS in Barcelona. To prepare myself for the task, I visited not only Hans Borst, my predecessor, but also the late John Kirklin, then-Editor of the *Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* (JTCVS) in Birmingham, AL, and Tom Ferguson, then-Editor of the *Annals of Thoracic Surgery* (ATS) in St Louis, MO. Shortly after the annual meeting, two huge boxes arrived in my office from Hannover, containing all manuscripts submitted and under review for the journal. I was totally unprepared for this onslaught and had to organize my editorial office quickly. Competent editorial staff was simply unavailable and finances were very limited. Luckily my wife agreed to help me with editorial work free of charge. My first decision was to introduce the concept of an Editorial Board, where leading specialists in various fields of cardio-thoracic surgery assessed submissions, proposed improvements and determined their suitability for publication. After a preliminary analysis by the Editor-in-Chief, manuscripts were transferred to Associate Editors, who selected reviewers, assessed revisions and made the final decisions.

When I took over the task of Editor-in-Chief, EJCTS was published by Springer (Heidelberg, Germany) in a bimonthly mode (Fig. 2) with our contract calling for 680 pages per year. A major problem arose quickly: we were receiving and accepting much more material than we could publish with the limited number of pages available (Fig. 3). Springer was not helpful in this matter and their only advice was to increase the rejection rate of

manuscripts. As Editor, I was obliged to publish material from our annual meeting, which already exceeded printing space available. This caused our publishing backlog to steadily increase every month. Publication time, which is defined as the period between the arrival of a manuscript at the editorial office and its appearance in the journal, rose to an unacceptable level of more than a year (Fig. 4). With no simple solution available, I started



Figure 2: EJCTS cover 1994, published by Springer.

to look for another publisher for EJCTS. On Tom Ferguson's advice, I established contact with Elsevier (Amsterdam, Netherlands), who immediately evinced great interest in becoming our new publisher. They also proffered the most valuable assistance by introducing me to Ian Beecroft, who agreed to take over duties as Managing Editor. He joined our staff in 1995 and professionalized the management of the editorial office. After the EACTS council approved the change of publisher, Elsevier worked with the help of their publishing manager, Nicole van Det, to redesign the journal (Fig. 5) as well as to increase circulation and advertising revenue. The official transition was effected in January 1997 with the journal's new look, and this event was celebrated at a small party during an STS meeting in San Diego that same year (Fig. 6).

Although journals in the same field are considered to be in direct competition, a close cooperation developed in the following years between the three major cardio-thoracic journals—JTCVS, ATS and EJCTS. Editors were invited to their counterparts' editorial meetings and participated in program committee deliberations of all three organizations. This cooperation led to an authoritative statement about parallel or duplicate publications [5], prepared during an *ad hoc* consultation of editors at the EACTS meeting in Glasgow in 1999, which is still valid today:

For the purposes of this declaration, redundant publication is defined as follows:

- (I) The hypothesis is similar.
- (II) The numbers or sample sizes are similar.
- (III) The methodology is identical or nearly so.
- (IV) The results are similar.
- (V) At least 1 author is common to both reports.
- (VI) No or little new information is made available.

During my tenure of office, we introduced a major change in journal management by switching to electronic submission and reviewing, which was most ably instituted by Ian Beecroft. This was a logical step, but the technical difficulties encountered in its implementation were substantial. The change was rapidly

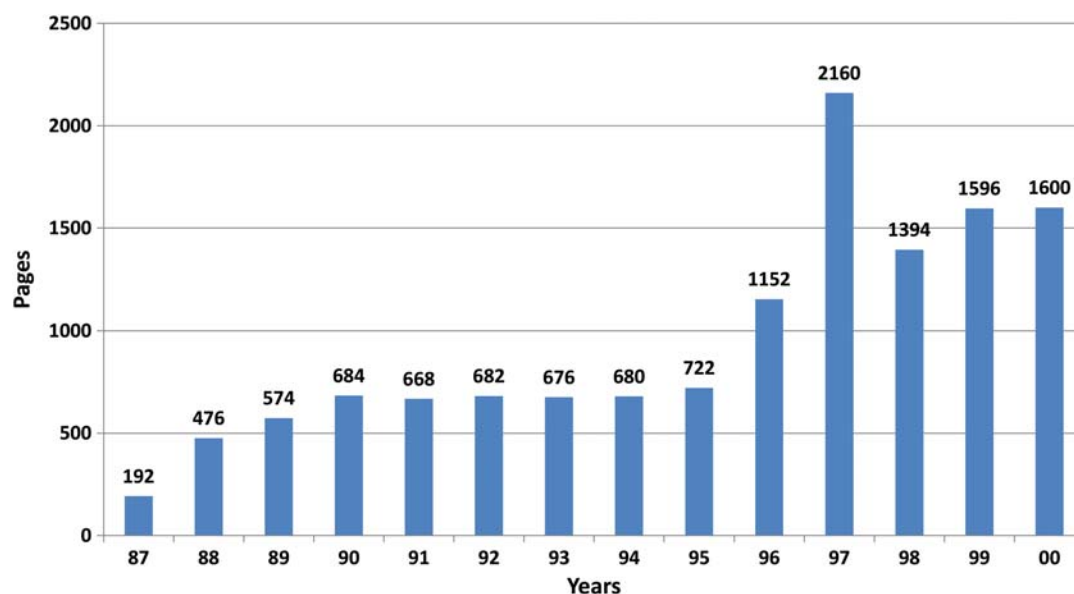


Figure 3: EJCTS: pages published in 1987–2000.

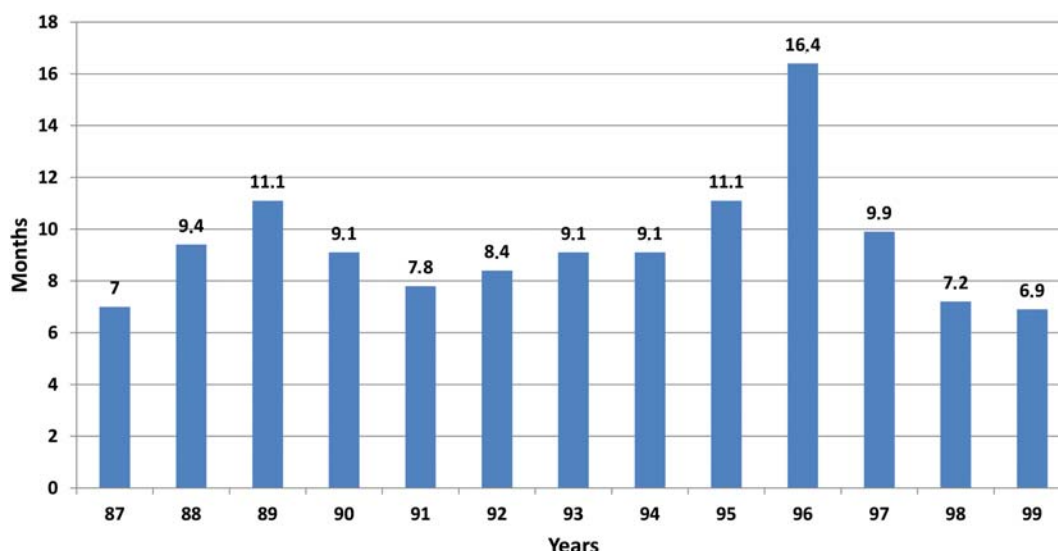


Figure 4: EJCTS: publication times in 1987–1999.

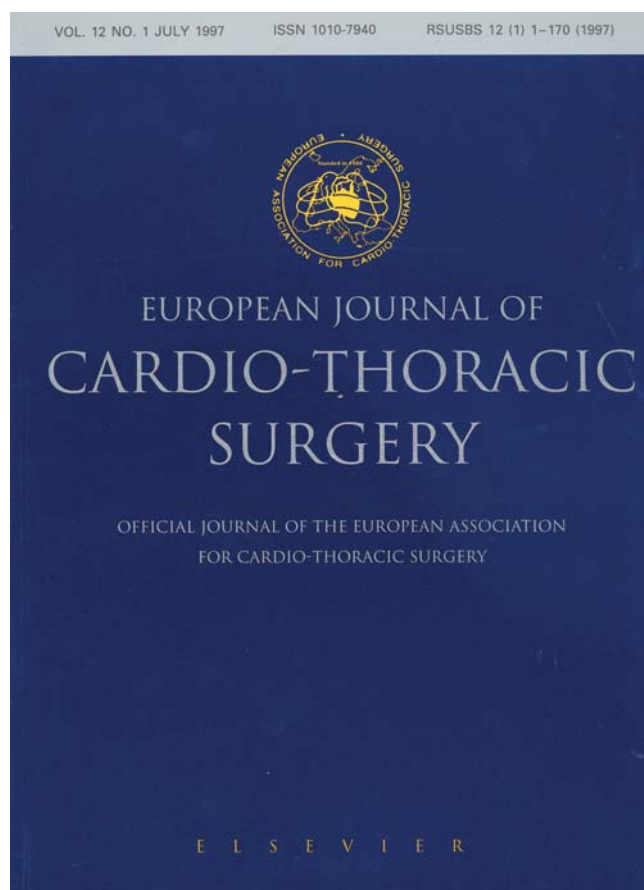


Figure 5: EJCTS cover 1997, published by Elsevier.

accepted by authors, as shown in our statistics from 2000 (Fig. 7). Today, this mode of manuscript submission is considered logical and self-explanatory but with the implementation of this system at the beginning of 2000, it made us one of the leaders in the field of web-assisted publishing.

The EACTS Council made a wise decision to appoint Ludwig von Segesser as my successor. The editorial transition was



Figure 6: Celebration of the new journal look during the STS Meeting in San Diego 1997 (from left to right): Marko Turina, Nicole van Det, Ian Beecroft, Tom Ferguson, Helga Turina.

smooth, and he continued to lead EJCTS to new peaks of quality and innovation.

THE EJCTS AND ITS SISTER, INTERACTIVE CARDIOVASCULAR AND THORACIC SURGERY

*by Ludwig von Segesser, Lausanne
Editor-in-Chief from 2000–2010*

This Editor's story of the EJCTS starts as an author with the submission of a study on descending thoracic aortic aneurysm repair, which was presented at the first congress of the European Association in Vienna in September 1987. At that time, writing a paper was still quite a manual task, relying on a mechanical typewriter, scissors and tape for cutting and pasting, and a lot of white paint for corrections and re-corrections. Graphics were pieces of art. Columns required different shades and hashed patterns which were selected from sheets, cut out with a ruler and

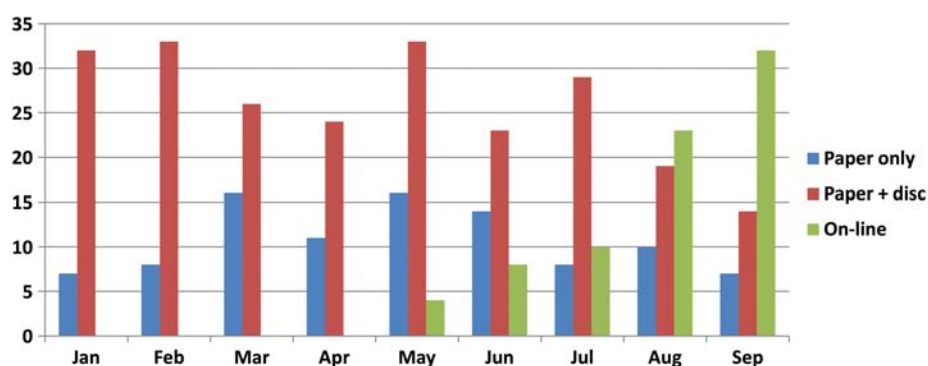


Figure 7: EJCTS: evolution of electronic submissions in 2000.

a knife and pasted at the right spot, preferably. Well, that paper got accepted [6], and there have been more ever since.

When Marko Turina subsequently became Editor-in-Chief, I was appointed to his team as an Assistant Editor. Much paper-work had to be dealt with, which meant regular visits to the post-office. At that time, we had a weekly editorial conference at the editorial office situated at the Zurich University Hospital close to the offices of the Department of Cardio-Vascular Surgery. Every manuscript and its different versions on paper were assessed individually, and the recommendations/decisions documented again on paper, similar to that of a patient chart. As a result of expert review, some papers were resuscitated, and some survived while others expired.

When the position of the Editor-in-Chief of the EJCTS was announced in the 2000 EACTS newsletter, I did not notice this until Marko Turina encouraged me to send an application. I first asked Axel Haverich, Hans Borst's right hand, not only in surgery but also in editing, whether he might be interested in taking the job. As this was not the case, I submitted an application for the position of Editor-in-Chief of the EJCTS together with my list of publications. Being an author myself, I had been exposed to the EJCTS and most other publications in the field.

In my proposal to the search committee of the EACTS, I came up with three objectives.

- (i) Bring the Impact Factor of the EJCTS on a level playing field with the ATS and the JTCVS.
- (ii) Find a solution for the papers not accepted for the EJCTS, which were not necessarily less interesting than the accepted ones, but involved, for example, the topics, which were less mature like new procedures or new technology. Hence, the idea was to launch a second publication with a different scope, possibly including vascular topics.
- (iii) Take the advantage of the new media, the world wide web in general, as well as colour illustrations, sound and, more specifically, video.

Apparently, the proposal submitted to the search committee made its way to the Council and then to the General Assembly of the EACTS in the year 2000. As the minutes of the latter tell, I was honoured to serve the association as Editor-in-Chief of the EJCTS and was thrown into cold water right away [7]. Fortunately Marko Turina had appointed Ian Beecroft in Martigny, Switzerland, as a Managing Editor, who was later joined by Rita Brightwell and Judy Gaillard. This extraordinary editorial team had set up the transition to an electronic manuscript submission and assessment system. Although Martigny is only ~60 km away from Lausanne, the

physical distance between the editorial office and the new Editor-in-Chief at the Department of Cardio-Vascular Surgery at the CHUV in Lausanne, Switzerland, certainly helped to blow the paper away and was also an effective driver for the all electronic editing and publishing activities that developed later.

Increasing the Impact Factor for the EJCTS meant more rejection of submissions in order to increase the proportion of papers with frequent citations. Hence, the suggestion of a second publishing channel was taken up immediately. In order to convince the publisher, the new publication had to have a different scope. We needed a new concept, a new title, a new platform, a new editorial board and, of course, a new budget.

The new concept was driven by the possibilities of the world wide web, making the content available instantly and globally. The desire to create an avenue for virtual communication between the readers and authors has paved the way for the open online discussion forum that we now have. The new title, Interactive CardioVascular and Thoracic Surgery (ICVTS) reflected the increased scope [8]—with the inclusion of vascular topics—as well as the dynamism of this young publication. At the same time, it was created with the global audience in mind and thus a globe was placed on the cover in the upper left corner of ICVTS. Free access was mandatory for such a web-driven global publication and brought about a major budget headache. This was initially solved by extracting a few pages from each of the 12 issues of the EJCTS in order to create the initial four issues of ICVTS.

I have to admit that there has been a lot of resistance from many sides with regard to the launch of a second journal like ICVTS. But this Editor has benefited from the unconditional support of the EACTS council. This enabled the development of a dual product strategy with the 'Impact Factor-driven', conventional EJCTS [9] and the 'web-driven', experimental ICVTS [10]. As a matter of fact, self-publishing of ICVTS by EACTS became necessary, in order to introduce many novelties like the introduction of supporting videos [11–13] in ICVTS first. Following the proof of principle, these were then published in the EJCTS [14–16].

Today, the EJCTS has an Impact Factor of 2.293 and interestingly enough, there is a virtual Impact Factor of ~1.0 for ICVTS, as calculated by two different independent sources (the virtual Impact Factor is calculated by the same formula as the Impact Factor published by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI): citations from the two previous years divided by the number of publications in the current year). The self-publishing activities developed in-house by EACTS for bringing ICVTS up to speed has also proven to be a sustainable platform for publishing books within the scope of our specialties [17].

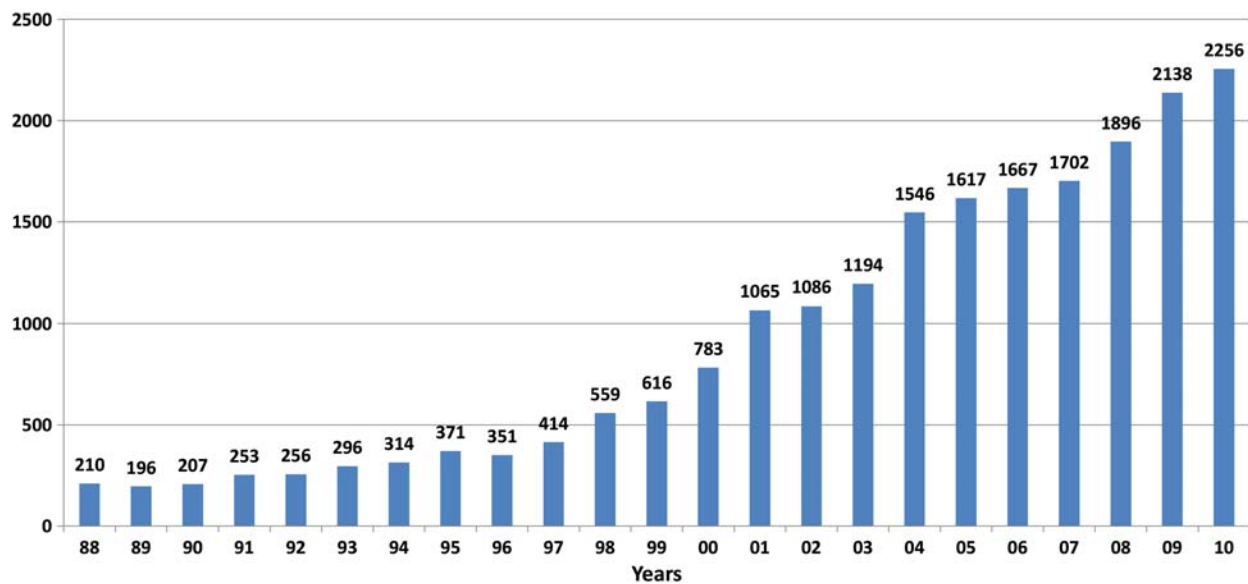


Figure 8: EJCTS: number of submissions in 1988–2010.

Overall, my 10-year tenure as Editor-in-Chief was quite a challenging task. It forced me to be disciplined, checking the journal's website several times per day or night throughout the years and at least every other day during my travels. It showed me that access to the websites of ICVTS and EJCTS is possible from the remotest areas of the world, be it in Central America or North Vietnam at almost any time, although the speed of the feed is dependent on the status of underwater cables and the like. It made me humble because of the wealth of ideas I have had the privilege to assess. I wish for my successor, Friedhelm Beyersdorf in Freiburg, Germany, all the support he may require—from the authors to the readers and from the publishers to the owner of these publications, the EACTS.

THE EJCTS AND THE ICVTS: CONTINUATION OF THE EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

*by Friedhelm Beyersdorf, Freiburg
Editor-in-Chief from 2010–today*

For many years, I was fortunate enough to perform various functions for the EACTS (e.g. as Council member) as well as EJCTS (e.g. as a reviewer and Associate Editor). This was a great time for me and I was proud to be part of a larger movement to develop cardio-thoracic surgery in Europe.

In October 2010, members of the EACTS elected me as the new Editor-in-Chief of the EJCTS/ICVTS during its general assembly. This tremendous honour was accepted with joy but also with the acknowledgment that this task would involve commitment and responsibilities.

During the transitional period between 2010 and 2011, several major changes had to be implemented, providing us with the opportunity to set new directions and open new paths into the future.

Ian Beecroft (Managing Editor from 1996 to 2010) embarked on his long-standing plan of leaving the publishing business and starting his own company. This was a great loss to all of us in the editorial office because of his profound knowledge and wealth of experience with publishing companies and the EJCTS. In addition, Rita Brightwell retired after many years of service from the

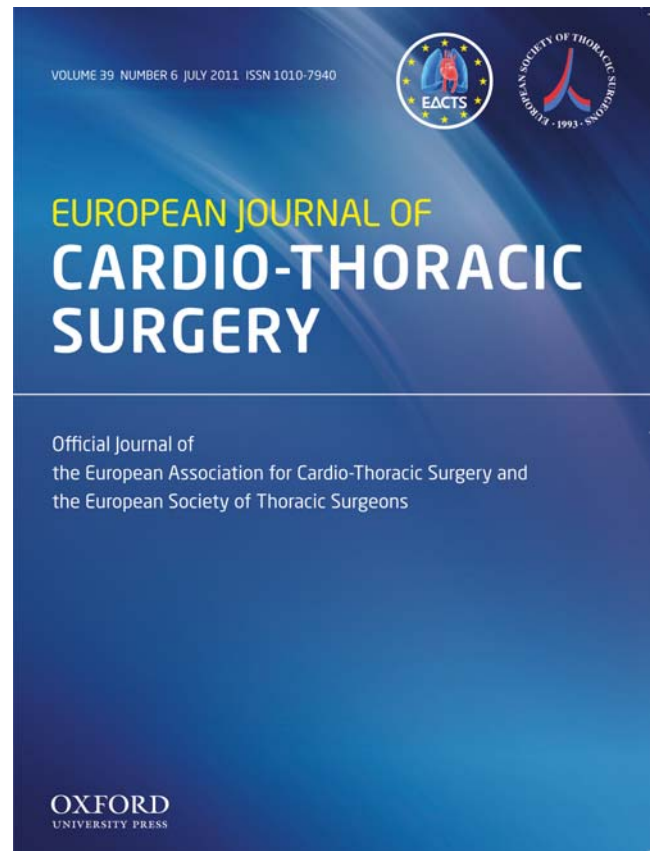


Figure 9: EJCTS cover 2012, published by OUP.

EJCTS, which meant the departure of yet another experienced employee. Concurrently, the editorial office had to be moved from Martigny (Switzerland) to Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany).

On top of these changes, the contract with Elsevier ended in 2011 and a new publisher had to be found. Following intensive negotiations with several potential partners, Oxford University Press (OUP) was chosen as our new publisher. Together with the EJCTS,

the two other organs of the EACTS, the 'ICVTS' and the 'Multimedia Manual of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery' (MMCTS; Editor-in-Chief of MMCTS: Marko Turina) are now published by OUP.

In the meantime, we have established a wonderful team at the editorial office with Judy Gaillard as the Managing Editor, Franziska Lüder as the Editorial Manager and Melanie Künze and Jia-Lin Müller as Trainee Editors. The office in Freiburg runs very smoothly and helps me to cover all the work despite a busy surgical day.

With a steadily increasing number of submissions (Fig. 8), the role of the Associate Editors cannot be underestimated. Together with the reviewers and biostatisticians, they do outstanding, extremely time-intensive work and I would like to thank them all. In order to further cut down on the time between submission and final decision on manuscripts, our group of Assistant Editors is there for all 'emergencies' (urgent reviews, arbitrary functions, etc.) that may arise during the review process.

Starting in January 2012, there have also been a number of changes made to the EJCTS. The cover has been spruced up (Fig. 9) to give a fresh new look to the journal. New features within the journal have been put into place to improve the quality of the papers [18]: a new website, monthly 'Editor's choice' articles, supporting material (such as additional supplements and videos) are linked to the online article, free colour figures, changes in the layout and a soon-to-come improved EJCTS App (the first EJCTS App was launched in 2011) [19]. Similar changes to the layout and style have also been installed for ICVTS and more interactive features are being planned along with access to advance content of the corrected proof [18].

Another point worth mentioning is that the EJCTS is the official publication organ for the EACTS and the European Society of Thoracic Surgery (ESTS), whereas the ICVTS is the official publication organ of the EACTS and The European Board of Cardiovascular Perfusion (EBCP) [20].

As we look into a bright future together with our colleagues from the other cardiovascular and thoracic scientific journals around the world, I call on all parties to strive to better the science in thoracic and cardiovascular surgery.

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